

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 SAM-01 SAB-01 IO-11 SCCT-01 ACDA-05

SSM-03 MC-02 OMB-01 /094 W
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P R 101501Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 108

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 0994

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINT IS US

SUBJ: KNESSET DEBATE ON RABIN'S US VISIT

SUMMARY. COALITION PARTIES RALLIED TOGETHER FEB 9 IN DEFEATING LIKUD NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION, BUT BENEATH SURFACE UNITY THERE IS CONSIDERABLE CONCERN IN LABOR ALIGNMENT CIRCLES OVER IMPLICATIONS OF ARMS SUPPLY FLAP. DESPITE RABIN'S EXPLANATIONS, PERES-RABIN RELATIONSHIP REMAINS TENSE. LOCAL OBSERVERS DO NOT FORESEE IMMINENT CRISIS, BUT BELIEVE RABIN'S DOMESTIC STANDING HAS BEEN DMAGED. INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION IS CONSIDERABLY MORE UNCERTAIN THAN IT WAS A MONTH AGO. END SUMMARY.

1. ISRAELI KNESSET FEB 9 STRUCK DOWN 63-34-12 MOTION OF NO-CONFIDENCE INTRODUCED BY OPPOSITION LIKUD OVER "AFFAIR OF THE ARMS SUPPLY LISTS" DURING RABIN'S WASHINGTON VISIT. OUTCOME, WHICH WAS CLEAR EVEN BEFORE SESSION BEGAN, FOUND LABOR ALIGNMENT AND ITS COALITION PARTNERS UNITED IN SUPPORT OF RABIN, LIKUD
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ALONE IN VOTING AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT, AND SMALLER RELIGIOUS

AND LEFT/RADICAL PARTIES ABSTAINING. GENERAL CONSENSUS OF POLITICIANS WAS THAT PRO-FORMA NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION WAS TACTICAL MISTAKE WHICH GUARANTEED THAT LABOR ALIGNMENT WOULD CLOSE RANKS WHATEVER VIEWS OF INDIVIDUAL MKS MIGHT BE.

2. SPEAKING FOR LIKUD, MK HAIM LANDAU (HERUT) CALLED ON RABIN TO RESIGN, CLAIMING THAT HIS ARMS RBHUESTR REMAKRS HAD HARMED ISRAELI SECURITY INTERESTS AND UNDERCUT CREDIBILITY OF GOVERNMENT AND DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT. IN SHARP PERSONAL ATTACK, LANDAU QUESTIONED RABIN'S ABILITY TO FUNCTION UNDER PRESSURE AND ACCUSED HIM OF SHOWING LACK OF JUDGMENT IN MAKING SUCH CRITICAL REMARKS WHILE ABROAD. LANDAU ALSO CHARGED THAT US/ISRAELI COORDINATION ON NEGOTIATIONS, WHICH RABIN HAD PRESENTED AS MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT OF US VISIT, WAS INSTEAD OPENING TO NEW US PRESSURES FOR ISRAELI WITHDRAWALS ON WEST BANK LEADING TO EVENTUAL CREATION OF "ARAFAT" STATE AND/OR RECOGNITION OF PLO AT GENEVA.

3. RABIN CHARACTERIZED LIKUD CHARGES AS EFFORT TO INFLATE MARGINAL MATTER INTO FULL-FLEDGED POLITICAL CRISIS. RABIN DEVOTED MOST OF HIS PRESENTATION TO POSITIVE ASSESSMENT OF US/ISRAELI RELATIONS, INCLUDING SHARED VIEW OF MIDDLE EAST SITUATION, AND BROAD COMMON AGREEMENT ON APPROACH TO NEGOTIATIONS (SEPTTEL). HE ASSURED KNESSET THAT THERE WAS NO NEED FOR NEW OPERATIVE DECISIONS AT THIS TIME.

4. ON HIS BACKGROUND REMARKS RE ISRAELI ARMS REQUESTS, RABIN SAID, "ANYBODY ATTRIBUTING TO ME AN INTENTION WHICH I DID NOT HAVE IS BOTH WRONG AND MISLEADING. IF THE IMPRESSION WAS CREATED THAT I CRITICIZED THE DEFENCE MINISTER AND THE DEFENCE ESTABLISHMENT, THAT IS TO BE REGRETTEED, BECAUSE IT WAS DEFINITELY NOT MY INTENTION".

5. RABIN CREATED FRESH CONSTERNATION AMONG PARLIAMENTARIANS BY DEPARTING FROM PREPARED TEXT TO OBSERVE THAT US EFFORTS TO MEET ISRAELI ARMS REQUESTS EVEN INVOLVED CUTTING INTO INVENTORIES OF AMERICAN UNITS. CHALLENGED BY LIKUD BACK-BENCHERS AS TO WHY HD FELT IT NECESSARY TO MAKE THIS OBSERVATION, RABIN SAID, "DO YOU THINK THIS IS A SECRET IN THE US?" SOME LABOR ALILMENT MKS TOLD US SUBSEQUENTLY THAT THEY ALSO REGARDED THIS AS GRATUITOUS OBSERVATION, PROVIDING ADDITIONAL BASIS FOR ANTI-ISRAELI ELEMENTS

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IN US TO OPPOSE ISRAELI ARMS REQUESTS.

6. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, RABIN AT ALIGNMENT FACTION MEETING EARLIER IN DAY MADE SAME POINTS AS IN PLENARY. ALIGNMENT AVOIDED INTERNAL DEBATE, PARTLY TO PULL TOGETHER TO BLOCK LIKUD INITIATIVE BUT APPARENTLY ALSO AS RESULT OF CONSIDERABLE DISQUIET AT IMPLICATIONS OF RABIN'S PERFORMANCE WHICH MANY NKS FELT CALLED FOR MORE THAN PERFUNCTORY CONSIDERATION. EX-HISTADRUT

LEADER YITZHAK BEN AHARON, HOWEVER, SAID THAT GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN SHAKEN TO ITS FOUNDATIONS, CHARGED THERE WAS NO HARMONY AMONG SENIOR LEADERSHIP AND CHARACTERIZED SITUATION AS SERIOUS. PERES REPORTEDLY DID NOT SPEAK AT ALL, AND ONLY ONE LABOR MK CAME ACTIVELY TO RABIN'S DEFENSE.

7. COMMENT. UNDER SURFACE IMPRESSION OF UNITY IN LABOR ALIGNMENT VOTE, IT SEEMS CLEAR FROM OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH MKS AND JOURNALISTS THAT RABIN'S DOMESTIC POSITION--FIRST AND FOREMOST WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY--HAS BEEN DAMAGED. RABIN SEEMED NERVOUS AND ILL AT EASE IN PLENUM PRESENTATION. LOCAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT TENSIONS IN RABIN/PERES RELATIONSHIP HAVE BEEN PAPERED OVER BUT NOT RESOLVED. FOR THE MOMENT NO ONE EXPECTS A CRISIS, BUT INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION IS VIEWED HERE AS CONSIDERABLY MORE FLUID AND UNCERTAIN THAN IT WAS A MONTH AGO. (AS ON OPPOSITINC MK PUT IT, THERE IS ALREADY HALF A CRISIS; A PRO-ALIGNMENT JOURNALIST THOUGHT TWO MORE MISTAKES BY RABIN MIGHT PRECIPITATE INTERNAL RESHUFFLE.) IRONY OF SITUATION IS THAT ARMS AFFAIR FLAP--IN ITSELF RECUPERABLE--HAS CAST CLOUD OVER VISITS'S MORE IMPORTANT SUBSTANTIVE ASPECTS. BY EVOKING MEMORIES OF EARLIER INSTANCES IN WHICH RABIN MISHANDLED THE SITUATION (SEBASTIA, PLAN FOR GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION, CENSORSHIP RULES), THE INCIDENT HAS NOW PUT IN DOUBT HIS FUTURE.
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